

Interagency Wilderness Policy Council

The Wilderness Act is one of the nation's most important pieces of conservation law. The Act established a National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) to be administered by federal land management agencies. Management of wilderness is complex and requires careful stewardship by each of the agencies.

Leaders from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), and U.S. Geological Service Biological Resources Division (USGS BRD) have frequently ascribed to efforts to increase interagency wilderness cooperation and coordination. Their efforts have included an interagency Strategic Plan for Wilderness and inauguration of an interagency steering committee for the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center and the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute. Improved interagency cooperation resulted in the development of the concept of a broader council to address wilderness issues beyond training and science. In June 1999 the Chief of the Forest Service called a meeting with the heads of the other wilderness management agencies, and all agreed that establishment of Interagency Wilderness Policy Council was in the best interest of the wilderness resource, the wilderness management agencies, and the taxpayers of the United States.

Consequently, the Interagency Wilderness Policy Council was established to improve interagency coordination in administering the Wilderness Act, thereby enhancing protection and management of the nation's wilderness to benefit present and future generations. Establishment of the Council is consistent with the intent of the Wilderness Act as well as the National Performance Review objective of creating a more efficient government.

The Council consists of policy level representatives of the four wilderness management agencies and research representatives from the Forest Service and the Department of Interior. The Council works with other agencies, institutions, interest groups, and the public as needed to address specific issues.

The goals of the Interagency Wilderness Policy Council are to:

1. Identify and clarify issues of national significance concerning preservation and stewardship of the National Wilderness Preservation System and wilderness study areas in order to recommend and advocate coordinated agency actions.
2. Provide a national interagency forum to coordinate and improve consistency in the interpretation and implementation of the Wilderness Act to the fullest extent practicable.
3. Increase internal and external awareness, understanding, and support for the National Wilderness Preservation System.
4. Review and evaluate the effectiveness of agency efforts to improve preservation, stewardship, and support for the National Wilderness Preservation System.

These issues and concerns may be identified by agency staff or by external publics. Agency staff may also contact Council members directly to raise key concerns. Other agencies, interest groups, and the public are encouraged to bring issues to the Council's attention. These entities or individuals may be invited to send a representative to the Council when specific issues are addressed. Guidance or policy recommendations developed and approved by the Council are forwarded to their respective agency heads for concurrence, dissemination, and implementation.

The Council meets as necessary, and minutes of the meetings may be found on the Internet at www.wilderness.nps.gov for those interested in reviewing Council proceedings.

